

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

The Reign of Terror

Gouverneur Morris to Thomas Jefferson, September 10, 1792

Dear Sir:
... We have had one week of unchecked murders, in which some thousands have perished in this city. It began with between two and three hundred of the clergy, who had been shut up because they would not take the oaths prescribed by law, and which, they said, was contrary to their conscience. Thence these executors of speedy justice went to the *Abbaye*, where the persons were confined who were at court on the tenth. These were despatched also; and, afterwards, they visited the other prisons. All those who were confined, either on the accusation or suspicion of crimes, were destroyed. Madame de Lamballe was (I believe) the only woman killed, and she was beheaded and disembowelled; the head and entrails were paraded, on pikes, through the street, the body dragged after them. They continued, I am told, at the Temple, till the Queen looked out at this horrid spectacle.

Yesterday the prisoners from Orleans were put to death at Versailles. The destruction began here about five in the afternoon, on Sunday, the second instant. A guard had been sent, a few days since, to make the Duke de la Rochefoucault prisoner. He was on his way to Paris, under their escort, with his wife and mother, when he was

taken out of his carriage and killed. The ladies were taken back to La Roche Guyonne, where they are now, in a state of arrestation [*under arrest*]. Monsieur de Montmorin was among those slain at the Abbaye. You will recollect that a petition was signed by many thousands to displace the Mayor, on account of his conduct on the twentieth of June. The signing of this petition is considered as a sufficient proof of the crime of *feillantisme* [*support for a political faction*], and it was in contemplation with some to put all those who were guilty of signing that petition to death. This measure seems, however, to be suspended, (for the present at least) but as there is no real executive authority, the plan may be easily resumed, should it suit the views of those who enjoy the confidence of that part of the people who are now active.

I am, very dear sir,
very sincerely yours,

GOUV. MORRIS

Source

"Emperor Dead" and other Historic American Dispatches, Edited by Peter D. Eicher, pp. 46-47; Washington, D.C.: 1997